

Red Hill, Slave Cabin
Patrick Henry National Memorial
Brookneal Vicinity
Charlotte County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1034-G

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VA,
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RED HILL - SLAVE CABIN (Patrick Henry National Memorial)

HABS No. VA-1034-G

Location: Approximately 1.1 miles south of State Route 619, 5.3 miles south^{east} of Brookneal, in Charlotte County, Virginia.

Present Owner/Occupant: Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation.

Significance: Red Hill was the final home and burial site of Patrick Henry (1736-99), prominent Revolutionary War and early national patriot, politician, orator, and lawyer. Henry was a leader in provoking and organizing resistance to British government of the colonies; served as governor of Virginia five times during the 1770-80s during the American Revolution and its aftermath; and led the opposition to ratifying the U.S. Constitution in Virginia in 1788. He thereafter withdrew from state politics and resumed a successful law practice. Henry occupied Red Hill from 1794 until 1799, when he died. Red Hill is a 1950s interpretation of a typical well-to-do eighteenth-century planter's home in Southside Virginia. This building is alleged to represent a Henry-era slave cabin and to be composed of some historic building fabric.

In 1978 the U.S. Department of the Interior recognized Red Hill as a national landmark and entered the property in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1986 the property was designated a National Memorial to Patrick Henry by an act of Congress.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The original Patrick Henry plantation was built at least by 1794; the much-altered and enlarged dwelling burned in February 1919. Reconstruction/restoration of the slave cabin was completed in 1956.
2. Architect: Stanhope Johnson.
3. Original plans and construction: A copy of Stanhope Johnson's 1956 reconstruction plans are on file in the Red Hill archives. All buildings at Red Hill date from the restoration/reconstruction.

- ##### B. Historical Context:
- The eighteenth-century slave cabin, of which a typical Virginia plantation probably consisted of several, was typically a one- or two-room, one or one and one-half story frame building that had minimal amenities. The chimney would have served a cooking hearth, floors could be dirt or wood, and furnishings would be minimal and in poor condition. The poor condition of the building and its limited contents was reinforced by the many persons or multiple families assigned to live there. For a general context, see Dwelling report.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building is a romanticized interpretation of a one-room log cabin with a large, utilitarian gable-end chimney and an attic story.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 16'-0" x 18'-2".
2. Foundation: Uncut flagstone laid in irregular courses. Two wood louvered vents in the south corners of the east and west walls provide ventilation.
3. Walls: The walls consist of eleven V-notched hewn logs. The space between the logs is filled with wood shingles, laid at an angle, which comprise nogging; it is chinked with portland cement. The gable-end pediments are clad with horizontal wood planks.
4. Structural systems, framing: Log with chinking.
5. Chimney: A single, exterior chimney of uncut stone, laid in irregular courses, dominates the west gable end. It is shouldered and narrows about 7' above the foundation.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways, doors: The cabin has two side entries, one on the north facade off center and on the south facade centered. Both doors are of board and batten construction. Each doorway is reached by a single cut flagstone step, surmounted by wood steps. Both doorways are recessed in simple wood framing. A thick wood dowel protrudes from the walls to the side of each door frame, some 6' above the foundation, which may have been used as a coat hook. A flagstone bench is located along the wall of the cabin, west of the north entrance.

- b. Windows: The first-floor space has two horizontal inward-opening casements in the north and east facades, each with six lights. The attic story is lit by a single four-light wood-framed casement in the east gable pediment.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable with the ridge oriented east to west, covered with wood shingles lapped at the ridge.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Open eaves with rafters exposed on the side facades.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: The cabin contains a single space on each floor. A steep stairway in the northeast corner, to the east of the north doorway, leads to the loft. The large chimney base and hearth occupy most of the west wall. Entries are located on the north and south facades.
- 2. Stairway: A steep wood stairway joins the two floors. The stairs rise along the north facade one step to a small landing, then turn 90 degrees to seven more steps moving south along the east wall. Each step rises approximately 9-1/2" and is 9-0" wide.
- 3. Flooring: Irregular-width wood boards.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceiling are unfinished. The attic floor joists are exposed. A small wood fix-louvered vent has been cut in the ceiling directly above the hearth. Molding frames the walls and fireplace hearth on the first floor. Short side walls have been erected in the loft, rising 40" in from the eaves. There is no access to the space thus enclosed.
- 5. Doorways, doors: The doors are both vertical plank construction. The south door has a 4"-diameter hole at its base that serves as a "cat hole."
- 6. Decorative features, trim: The fireplace has a wood shelf for a mantel. A small closet has been created by enclosing the space beneath the stairs.
- 7. Hardware: Both doors have cast-iron Peterson box locks, and the windows cast-iron fittings. A cast-iron boot scraper, made from a horseshoe and an iron bar, is near the north entrance. A horseshoe is nailed above the north entrance to the cabin.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The slave cabin is southeast of the dwelling with its entrance on the north facades. It is the last in a row of dependencies that are linearly perpendicular to the ridgeline and orientation of the dwelling, although it is slightly west of this axis. To the east is a lawn and garden area, to the northeast is the smokehouse, to the south is the river.
2. Outbuildings: Besides the slave cabin, the estate includes the dwelling and five primary outbuildings that are described in individual reports: Addendum to law office, VA-1034-A; kitchen, VA-1034-C; smokehouse, VA-1034-D; privy, VA-1034-E; and stables and carriage house, VA-1034-F.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION: See Dwelling report, VA-1034-B.